

SHOUT

NEW YORK

MAY 2000

SURVIVING THE '80S ISSUE



CHRISTIAN BALE

MARK KOSTABI JAY McINERNEY BRET EASTON ELLIS MARC SPITZ JOHN POUND RAH DIGGA

\$2.95



SHOUT NEW YORK

MAY 2000, VOLUME 4, ISSUE #5

CONTENTS

COVER

32/ JUMPING BALE

The star of *American Psycho*, Christian Bale, didn't lose himself in his killer character. Even so, it was difficult switching to playing Jesus.

FASHION

39/ HUNGRY LIKE THE WOLF

In the '80s, there was a retro-'50s thing that looked nothing like the '50s. Remember the Stray Cats? This is a '00s version of the early '80s version of the late '70s version of the 20's

FEATURES

44/ DIARY OF AN '80S ART STAR

Mark Kostabi is a genius for self-promotion. Who better to interview him than Mark Kostabi?

48/ STAR '80S: BESTSELLER BAD BOYS

The authors of *Bright Lights*, *Big City* and *Less Than Zero* aren't planning any nostalgia book tours...not without the requisite limousines, models and cocaine.

52/ OUT OF THE GARBAGE

The Garbage Pail Kids impressed some adults as the most vile, disgusting images they'd ever seen. What kind of monster painted those things?



COLUMNS

8/ CALENDAR

After examining thousands of press releases, Calendar Man went with his gut and chose to hype only the truly deserving.

10/ DON'T MISS

Gennifer Flowers isn't expected at the Night of a Thousand Jennifers, but if she shows up with I.D., she'll get a special gift at the door.

25/ URBAN ELF REPORT

Saint Reverend Jen became Deputy Disco Fever in the Dance Liberation Front to give the mayor's no dancing rules a shake, rattle and roll.

14/ ARTIST'S PICK

Inka Essenhigh's canvas creations look like organic schematics for a viral apocalypse. Kostabi digs it.

26/ SHOW & TELL

When Jews hit puberty, their parents send them to Jewish summer camp so they'll hook up with other Jews. Only problem is, some of these 13-year-olds aren't ready to commit.

27/ MATING HABITS

Maggie Estep somehow evades capture even while her friends and family head to the big house. I smell a rat.

28/ NO EASTER

The disaffected young janitor and the amphibious destroyer of the military-industrial complex are one excerpt closer to their rendezvous.

29/ PLAIN-CLOTHES NAKED

Jerry Stahl remembered Mother's Day in this month's excerpt. There's probably a few mothers who wish he hadn't.

29/ WRITER'S PICK

Roger Waters dealt with rock stardom by erecting a wall between himself and the audience. In *Boy Island*, Camden Joy simply hides under a blanket.

FILM

16/ FILMMAKER'S PICK

Art Jones sat in the dark for over two hours, watching a man stand in front of a tree. No, there's got to be more to it than that.

17/ THE LOWDOWN

As if *Predator* didn't demonize Rastafarian hair styles enough, here comes Scientology poster boy Travolta with a headful of dreads.

18/ FRAME BY FRAME

The dawn of basketball gets the *Karate Kid* treatment in *The Basket*. Japanese lovers run from the Yakuza with style in *Adrenaline Drive*.

20/ PRESS PLAY

The real Emma Peel and a "video magazine" are reasons to go DVD. Tapeheads can enjoy Lady Day, Satchmo and the tribulations of three Bed-Stuy boxers.

MUSIC

24/ DISC-CONNECTED

Sleater-Kenny have the best twin guitar attack since late '60s Detroit. Plus: Lou Reed, urban poetry and every single note Davis and Trane ever blew together.

22/ MUSICIAN PROFILES

Atom and his Package have fun being too obnoxious for punk purists. The Imperial Rah Digga discusses *Dirty Harriet*.

ETCETERA

30/ BOOKS

Bee Season follows a spelling bee champ's journey through Jewish mysticism. A mother seeks the love of her biracial child in *Half A Heart*.

30/ WEBSITES

One of these dotcoms features "Hemp Jeopardy!" I forgot the other two. Dude. I could've written these contents in hemp ink.

64/ INTERSTELLAR TELEGRAM

The '80s saw massive increases in our nuclear arsenal. CIA drug deals funded right-wing death squads and President Reagan sought the advice of his wife's astrologer. Those were the days.

SHOPPING

31/ TALKING SHOP

Recycled bicycles are good for your health, easy on the wallet and the perfect fashion accessory for those moonlight rides through Central Park.

DINING

54/ FEEDING FRENZY

How French is your food? Probably not French enough for our strict seeker of authenticity.

56/ DEBUT DINING

Rustic is Mediterranean food with Manhattan class at Brooklyn prices.

THEATER

58/ CURTAIN CALL

The Penis Chronicles is a humorous response to Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues*. Arthur Miller's *Ride Down Mt. Morgan* stars Patrick Stewart.

59/ EXTREME THEATER

Here's a really good place where you're guaranteed to see a balls-out bar brawl, without any danger to you.

NIGHTLIFE

60/ HIGH CLASS HOOCH

Taking your cocktail out to the garden will help dissipate cigarette smoke and improve cellular phone reception.

61/ BAR CRAWL

Where to drink when you *want* to forget Mother's Day.

62/ CLUBSPOTTING

Rossa Cole turns in his most effective photography yet. If this doesn't make you think you missed the party, then you're really weird.

Star '80s: Bestseller Bad Boys

"Wait!" Jay McInerney says, interrupting himself and gesturing toward the back entrance of The Carlyle's tearoom with a Rolex clad arm. A slim woman with jet-black hair pauses at the door, deciding whether to enter the restaurant or retreat back into the lobby. The woman turns toward our table, her eyes passing over us without a glimmer of recognition, and McInerney's tanned face relaxes beneath a thick mop of blow-dried hair. "I thought that was Angelina Jolie," he explains, with a slightly embarrassed laugh, "speaking of the culture of celebrity..."

The culture of celebrity was, indeed, the topic on the table when McInerney was distracted by the possibility of a celebrity sighting. More than most novelists, McInerney knows something of celebrity. In 1984, after the release of his first (and still most popular) novel, *Bright Lights, Big City*, McInerney became the subject of

"There were no other people my age publishing novels about what they thought America was like at that time."

intense media scrutiny. Not only was the novel an almost instant critical and popular success, but it somehow tapped into some essence of the times. Although McInerney insists that story really chronicles New York life in the late '70s and the waning of the disco era, the novel came to exist in the public imagination as the ultimate drama of '80s excess and angst. Perhaps this perception was furthered by the fact that McInerney's lifestyle mirrored that of his protagonist: the author was a fixture of New York nightclubs, constantly engaging in drunken escapades, hoovering coke off any available horizontal surface and dating model Marla Hanson.

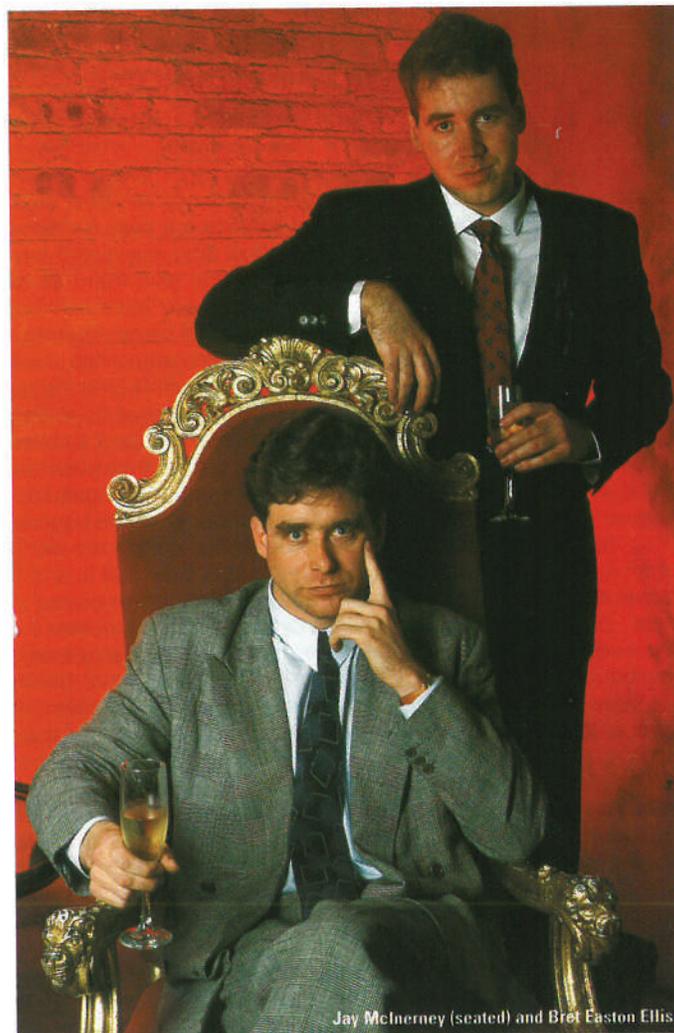
"I used to wake up in the morning and read the gossip columns to see where I had been," he says with a grin, pausing a moment before telling me that this is only a "slight exaggeration." McInerney speaks both bitterly and fondly of this time, which he feels somehow tarnished his reputation as a writer. "It's very easy for *Time* magazine to write about the Brat Pack—Jay McInerney, Bret Easton Ellis, Tama Janowitz—but it's not very easy for them to write about literary antecedents and modes of narrative discourse. It's not sexy," he explains, swishing the last dregs of cappuccino.

"Everything surrounding my career has been too personal, too much a part of this celebrity-watching culture. I became a kind of demi-celebrity. I had reporters camped out on my doorstep when I was dating Marla Hanson. We couldn't go anywhere. I had photographers stalking me. It became hard for people to see where *Bright Lights, Big City* ended and where my life started."

McInerney's latest novel, *Model Behavior*, released last month in paperback, is very much concerned with the culture of celebrity, which McInerney sees as the defining trait of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. "In 1984 the term 'Supermodel' didn't exist, which is something to really look back on and envy. Most heterosexual males couldn't name more than one model or fashion designer. Now, all of us know 12 models by their first names and guys who work at J.P. Morgan can rattle off the names of four Italian designers. The private lives of celebrities have become more and more of an obsession, not only of the general public but of the fourth estate. *People* magazine was an offshoot of journalism in 1984 and now it's the paradigm of journalism."

Bret Easton Ellis AND Jay McInerney

By Joanna Smith-Rakoff
Photograph By Ken Regan/Camera 5



Jay McInerney (seated) and Bret Easton Ellis



Intriguingly, the plot of *Model Behavior*, McInerney's satire of the '90s, bears a startling resemblance to the plot of *Bright Lights, Big City*. Both novels detail the downward spirals of young writers abandoned by their model girlfriends. The unnamed protagonist of *Bright Lights, Big City* (called Jamie Conway in the film) has a prestigious but dull job as a fact-checker at an unnamed venerable magazine (clearly, *The New Yorker*) and a rather substantial weakness for Bolivian Marching Powder. He spends his nights cavorting with Tad Allaghash, a posterchild for entitlement-theory with a pass to every club in Manhattan and a tab at Odeon. His late-'90s counterpart, Connor McKnight, also works a superficially impressive beat as the celebrity reporter for the fictional women's magazine *Ciaobella!* but is filled with self-loathing for the intellectual depths to which he, a lapsed scholar of Japanese literature, has sunk, composing fluff pieces that read like press releases for a publication he finds vapid and useless.

"When it first came out, people pointed out the similarities like they were trying to catch me trying to rip myself off," McInerney says, annoyed, "I certainly could have made them less alike if I had wanted to." Undoubtedly, *Model Behavior*, a thoroughly entertaining novel (his best since *Bright Lights*), is a purposeful revision of the earlier work. The difference between the two novels is the difference between the '80s and the '90s, and the way these two decades live in the writer's imagination.

The '80s, in McInerneyland, were a time of gleeful and childlike abandon, epitomized by the protagonist sniffing lines of coke off his desk at work while one

more concerned with these "radars" than the typical protagonist of a proper, ironic, postmodern novel. They are moral creatures within the corrupt New York *culturati*, disgusted and fascinated by their peers, both critical of and complicit with the culture they find so crude. Maybe you know these people—a friend, the editor at some Condé Nast rag, who's always complaining about the trashy articles she works on: "Oh, no. If I have to interview Julia Roberts again, I'll just die." Jay McInerney, as you've probably guessed, is one of these people, denouncing the horror of our vapid culture, despite his excitement at the prospect of chatting with an Oscar winner.

Still, I suppose we'd rather hang out with magazine editors and art directors and bitch about, say, the decline of *Harper's*, than spend quality time with Patrick Bateman, the status-obsessed, Phil Collins-loving, narcissistic bore of a serial killer who narrates Bret Easton Ellis' catatonia-inducing 1991 novel *American Psycho*. Morally, Bateman is, of course, the exact opposite of McInerney's misunderstood heroes: he's an amoral person in an immoral (if insipid, shallow and apocalyptic) world. As most everyone in the western world knows by now, Ellis intends the novel to be a satire of the '80s: the greed decade, the cocaine decade, the Wall Street decade (as if we're any less interested in stocks today). Patrick Bateman is an '80s guy gone awry—so immersed in consumer culture that he can't describe his attire without telling us the exact brand and fiber of his socks.

The fact that Bateman is a serial killer, Ellis tells me

"The difference between the '80s and '90s is that people drive Range Rovers instead of limos and they think this is more discreet."

of his colleagues sits at her own desk, working. "The '80s look incredibly innocent, almost, compared to the '90s. Certainly the amount of energy spent in pursuit of wealth is far greater now." The '90s according to McInerney is the "Stealth Decade," a period in which we were (and still are) not only obsessed with wealth and celebrity, but filled with self-loathing for our obsession with wealth and celebrity.

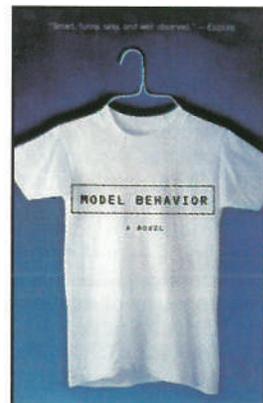
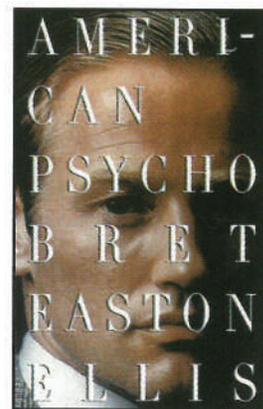
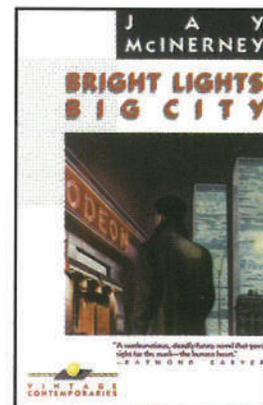
"The difference between the '80s and '90s," he suggests, "is that there's more hypocrisy now. People drive Range Rovers instead of limos and they think somehow that this is more discreet. Everyone thinks if they don't flaunt their wealth that no one will notice it. People think that somehow if they're not doing cocaine off the tables in restaurants, they'll escape the radars of the gods."

Ultimately, McInerney's characters are somewhat

over the phone from his home in Los Angeles, is only incidental; Ellis originally intended to write a novel about Wall Street traders, whom he saw as emblematic of the '80s.

"I had conceived of a very broad social satire about young people in Manhattan at this time, primarily focusing on guys who worked on Wall Street and why they were the icons of the time." The Bennington-educated author spent several weeks hanging around with a group of traders (siblings of friends) and was so horrified by their antics that he decided to turn the heat up a notch, transforming his antihero from merely an asshole to a psychotic killer—a role that didn't seem a stretch to Ellis, after his immersion in Wall Street culture.

"The 'American psycho' of the title," he tells me, "is really about being status-obsessed." Ellis feels somewhat conflicted about the violence in the novel,



ultimately admitting that it stemmed not merely from his impression of the Wall Street guys, but from his own "very black sensibility during the period when I was 24 and 25: all the rage and anxiety and frustration that guys in their mid-20s are going through." Interesting, seeing as Bateman tortures and mutilates the bodies of his victims so brutally as to make Hannibal Lecter

was kind of told to be a decade ago." Although the Toronto filming of *American Psycho* initially met with protest from Toronto residents, the fury died down soon after shooting began. Ellis doesn't foresee it rising up again, and suggests that it's because "a different generation controls the media now" making this a "more youth-oriented, much more open" era.

"People think that if they're not doing cocaine off the tables in restaurants, they'll escape the radars of the gods."

seem like Mr. Rogers by comparison.

Many a critic asked, upon the release of the book, if Ellis couldn't have managed to satirize the decade that spawned both his and McInerney's success without devoting the much-maligned book to the skinning alive of young prostitutes or the blinding of unfortunate homeless men. Ellis again insists that the violence is the least important part of the book ("The violence takes about five pages out of a 400 page novel") while admitting that those five pages are "very, very graphic and over-the-top." The shock and outrage of Ellis's critics, the same critics who lavished praise on his first novel, *Less Than Zero*, is rather odd since *American Psycho* seems almost an update of *Less Than Zero*. No, the narrator of *Less Than Zero* is not a serial killer—for those of you who have only seen the awful film adaptation. The short and disturbing novel chronicles the homecoming of Clay, a Hollywood kid who has just spent his first semester at Camden, a small New England liberal arts college (yes, that would be Bennington).

Clay finds himself horrified by his blonde, nihilistic friends, several of whom nurse serious smack habits; one is hospitalized for anorexia; and another has found a new and profitable form of employment as a male prostitute. The action culminates in the kidnapping and gang rape of a young girl. Clay doesn't participate,

Like McInerney, Ellis was the subject of much media attention upon the publication of his first novel. Again, the author's life rather too closely resembled that of his protagonists. But in Ellis's case there was more to his sudden celebrity than merely a taste for cocaine and models. Ellis wrote and published *Less Than Zero* while still an undergraduate at Bennington, an experience that rather alienated him from his peers, though, he says, "I felt alienated from everything anyway, at that age."

Less Than Zero, like *Bright Lights, Big City*, was very much taken up as a book that was defining of its time and Ellis attributes some of this to his tender age at the time of its creation and publication: "I suppose it was the first voice really coming out of that generation. There were no other people my age publishing novels about what they thought America was like at that time. I guess if you're the first, you tend to be the most noticed. And..." he jokes, "it was really, really short."

Although McInerney did not predict the popularity of his own first novel (quite the opposite, his editor firmly instructed him to squelch any hopes for sales beyond 10,000 copies), in 1985, when *Less Than Zero* was published, he felt certain that it would be seen as a West Coast version of his own book *Bright Lights, Big City*. The fact remains that the two novels couldn't be more

"The public isn't outraged by art in the way that it was told to be a decade ago."

but does nothing to help the girl, either. The novel, ultimately, is a comment on the perils of privilege, of indulgence, as these kids who have been given everything also feel they have the right to take anything they desire, even a human life. Much like Patrick Bateman.

Ellis surprisingly seems a perfectly amiable and rather gentle sort; he shies away from talking about his personal life, perhaps somewhat wary of reporters after the media fury surrounding the publication of *American Psycho*. He likes the tight schedule his publicist has put him on, he tells me, as he feels like he has "a real job." Moreover, the critics seem to have softened toward him, a fact he attributes to changing cultural attitudes.

"People's reaction to that material [the violence in *American Psycho*] is very different now than it was ten years ago," he says confidently. "The only time it seems to happen anymore is really just because of religious purposes. There doesn't seem to be that kind of outrage against sexuality or violence that you had in 1990. Looking back, that seems to be such a culturally conservative time. I don't think the public is outraged by art in the way that it

different—*Bright Lights* is as humorous and playful as *Less Than Zero* is dark and morose; McInerney's language is as lyrical as Ellis's is flat and uninflected. Regardless, the two novels have been linked—by readers, the media, etc.—ever since their fictive worlds of models, nightclubs and cocaine melded together.

The two authors who share an agent and whose works are often confused are, in fact, great friends. After realizing that Ellis might be subject to the same media scrutiny that he had been, McInerney befriended Ellis, throwing a huge star-studded dinner party for the young author upon his move to New York. The party exploded beyond McInerney's control, ending up at the Tunnel, where Ellis and McInerney—drunk and high—were photographed in a throne, wearing paper crowns. The photo ran the following week in *Time* magazine with the caption, "The New Kings of Literature?"

Only time will tell the staying power of their works, but for now it's safe to say that if not the kings of literature, Ellis and McInerney—as the above anecdote attests—still reign as the king chroniclers of the '80s. ♣